



Warrant Officer Gerald Bell 1909- 1989: Canada's First Black Airman

Gerald W.A. Bell's career before WWII started as a special constable for the RCMP in Hamilton. Bell wanted the time

the position allowed to prove himself as an athlete before becoming a doctor. He raced against Jesse Owens as a competitive sprinter; he was a trainer at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. He won 63 of 67 bouts as an amateur boxer. Secretly he also took flying lessons.

When The Hamilton Spectator leaked the story of "the brown birdman", Bell set aside medical aspirations to pursue what had become his passion--flying. He enlisted in the newly reorganized RCAF joining the No 19 Bomber Squadron Auxiliary. With them Bell enjoyed further training on one of four brand new de Havilland Moth aircraft. His unit started active full-time service Sept 3, 1939-- a week before Canada declared war on Germany.

During WWII Bell served with the 6th Bomber group in Yorkshire, England. He tested new aircraft, trained pilots and joined 424 Squadron as an air gunner on flying operations against the enemy. Following the war, Bell served at bases across Canada and with No. 3 Wing in Germany before retiring in 1961.

After 25 years of military service Bell began a 12 year career as a quality control officer at de Havilland and later at Spar Aerospace. In retirement Bell helped restore one of only two flying Avro Lancaster Bombers. That Lancaster, now housed permanently at the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum in Hamilton, reminds us of men like Warrant Officer Gerry Bell who served their country well in times of war and peace.

Gerald Bell's smoke trail still lingers in the skies, especially over his hometown Hamilton.

Photo: The Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum